

September 21, 2004

### **Six Gooding County Horses Reported Positive for West Nile Virus**

Six horses from Gooding County are reported positive for West Nile virus (WNV), and South Central District Health is reminding people of the importance of vaccinating their horses and protecting themselves and their families from mosquito bites.

According to the Idaho Dept. of Agriculture, 15 equine cases of West Nile virus have been reported in Idaho since the beginning of September. Six of the equine cases were located in Gooding County, four in Canyon County, three in Elmore County, and one each in Twin Falls and Payette counties. These cases coincide with the identification of WNV in three people in southern Idaho, including a case in Gooding County, as well as five WNV-positive birds in the same area. The three people who tested positive for WNV have all recovered.

Data suggests that most horses infected with West Nile virus recover, and veterinarians are encouraging horse owners to make sure their horses are vaccinated against the disease. The virus interferes with normal central nervous system functioning in horses and causes inflammation of the brain. There is no documented evidence that West Nile virus is transmitted between horses.

“When we see an increase in the number of cases of West Nile virus in the animal population, we can expect to see a jump in the number of cases in humans during the following year,” said Karin Frodin, RN, epidemiologist with South Central District Health. “We will be carefully watching the progression of this disease in Idaho. For the remainder of this season and next spring, people should be careful to protect themselves against mosquito bites and follow precautions for reducing mosquito habitat.”

Frodin advises people to insect proof their homes and reduce standing water on their property by emptying birdbaths and cleaning decorative ponds every few days. Other tips include covering up exposed skin when outdoors, applying insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing, and avoiding mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk.

Approximately 80 percent of people infected with West Nile virus do not feel sick. Others may experience a mild, flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever. Occasionally the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50. So far this year, there have been 1,508 human cases of West Nile virus reported in the United States and 45 deaths.

South Central District Health has been testing mosquito populations in various locations around the eight-county area all summer. To date, no mosquitoes have tested positive for West Nile virus in south central Idaho or anywhere else in the state.

For more information about the West Nile virus in humans, please visit the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s West Nile virus web site at <http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>. Additional information can also be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>.

For more information about West Nile virus in horses, visit the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>. Two manufacturers of WNV vaccine for horses also carry information about the disease. Their websites are <http://www.equinewestnile.com/> and <http://www.merial.com/index.html>.